



Rebels and Renegades by Calvariam Hedum

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Summary: Everyone in Twilight Company has a story. However, the story of six refugees from Moorja is stranger than most. Now, the group of young friends must stick together after they are forced to leave everything behind and join the fledgling Rebellion while a dark agent of the Emperor's will relentlessly hunts them down, eager to finish what he started.

1. A Call for Help

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...

REBELS AND RENEGADES

It is a dark time for the galaxy. The Republic has fallen and the Empire has risen to take its place. Emperor Palpatine rules countless star systems through fear and military might.

But all is not lost. The fledgling REBEL ALLIANCE has begun to strike at the Empire from hidden bases across the stars. Led by Captain Micha Evon, the Sixty-First Mobile Infantry, better known as TWILIGHT COMPANY, is at the forefront of the charge.

Meanwhile, a small group of survivors desperately fleeing from Imperial pursuit send out an urgent cry for help. Little does the Empire and the Rebellion know just how much a group of determined young friends can accomplish...

FIVE LIGHT-YEARS OFF THE CORELLIAN TRADE SPINE HYPERLANE

Nineteen years after the Clone Wars

"Tell me Lieutenant, have you ever seen the ruins of Rhen Var?"

Lieutenant Sairgon simply shrugged. "I can't say that I have, sir."

Captain Micha "Howling Mad" Evon leaned back in his chair and grinned, "They're quite a sight. Ancient stone hewed into glaciers of ice. A marvelous blend of architecture and natural design."

"I'd love to see them one day, sir" Sairgon said, just like he did every time Howl brought up such things with him.

"I'm glad to hear that," Howl responded. There was a brief pause before the old, gray-haired captain pressed a button on the console in front of him, "Well, back to work."

A hologram of Vir Aphshire appeared in the middle of the *Thunderstrike's* cramped meeting room. "Now, how are we going to pull this one off...?"

Twilight Company's current mission was simple; seize the planet of Vir Aphshire for its agricultural output, thus striking a blow against a small part of the Imperial infrastructure. *Small*, Howl thought, *but a blow nonetheless*.

For a good hour he discussed with his second-in-command Sairgon and later infantry squad leaders on how best to proceed with the attack. Howl was listening to Quartermaster Hober explain how much explosives the company could spare for the operation, when a throbbing pain seemed to intrude into his skull. The captain rubbed the side of his head and leaned forward slightly. It was almost as if the pain was slightly worming through his brain.

"We do have enough high-yield explosives to take out the maglev lines but..." Hober paused when he saw Howl's condition, "Sir, are you alright?"

"I'm fine, just a little headache, that's all." Howl responded. Then, just suddenly as it appeared, the pain was gone. *Odd*.

"Do you want me to get Von Geiz, sir?" Sairgon asked.

"No, I'm fine now..." Howl answered, sitting back up and folding his hands in front of him, "Please continue Hober."

The meeting went on for another half-hour before the leaders finally agreed upon a plan of attack. Howl dismissed the group and headed toward the bridge of the old, beat-up CR90 Corvette with Sairgon at his side. He put aside the strange headache in order to focus on the upcoming mission. "Is the *Thunderstrike* doing okay?" he asked as he settled down in the captain's chair.

"Everything's running smoothly, sir" one of the pilots responded, "We're ready to jump on your command."

"Good," Howl responded. He was just about to give the order to make the hyperspace jump to Vir Aphshire when one of the comm techs

called to him, "Sir, we have an incoming transmission."

That was unexpected. Howl turned to face her, "Is it from High Command?"

The tech shook her head, "No sir, it looks like they're using Imperial encryption codes."

Sairgon snapped to attention, ready to start relaying his orders. Howl calmly stood up and walked over to the tech's station to look over the codes. He relaxed slightly as he recognized them. "It's a Sector Ranger code."

"Sector Rangers?" one of the ensigns said, "You mean a couple of cops are calling us?"

"What, do they want to ticket us for loitering?" one of the pilots added.

"I don't think so", Howl said, considering the possibilities as to why Imperial law enforcement would be out in the middle of nowhere and how they got the *Thunderstrike's* hailing frequency. "It looks more like a distress signal."

"Shall I answer it, sir?" the tech asked.

Howl thought for a moment. *It could be a trap.* "Can you guarantee us a secure transmission?"

"I believe so, sir."

Howl paused another second more. "Alright, put it through. I'll take it personally" he finally ordered. The tech took off her headset and handed it to him. "Patching you through now."

Howl took a breath as he slipped the headset on, "Identify yourself immediately."

"Captain Evon?" the voice responded. Howl was a bit taken aback by the mention of his name. Sairgon lifted an eyebrow. The voice sounded gruff, but incredibly exhausted, Howl recognized it as the voice soldiers fresh from battle tended to have. "We need your help"

the voice continued.

The voice seemed somewhat familiar, but Howl couldn't quite place it. "Identify yourself" he repeated. He heard a somewhat exasperated sigh "Captain, its Hopper."

Howl's eyes widened slightly in surprise, "Lieutenant Hopper?"

"Well, I guess I'm not a Lieutenant anymore, but yeah, it's Hopper."

Howl recognized the voice now; he remembered hearing it on many a stakeout and police raid during his time as a Ranger. "I thought you settled down to become local law enforcement on Moorja..."

"I did, and we could talk about it later, but right now, I would *really* appreciate some assistance. We have a good portion of the Imperial fleet hunting us and we need someplace to hide."

"Hopper..."

"I have a datapad full of information about an MI research project; Project Hypergate, ever heard of it? It's yours if you help us."

Howl exchanged a glance with Sairgon, who shrugged. He turned back to the comm station, "Who's with you?"

"Refugees from Moorja," Hopper said, taking a breath "They're the only survivors of an Imperial cover-up in their town. We... what?" he said to someone off to the side. Howl heard an unintelligible, panicked response, and Hopper turned back to the comm, "Shavit... look, we have a kid in critical condition. Please, just... trust me."

Howl paused for a moment and sighed. He turned to the expectant navigator, "Send them our coordinates."

"You trust him?" Sairgon asked.

"Hopper is a good man, I served with him in the Rangers for years and he never really did buy into the Empire's ideals."

"People could change, sir."

"True, but if there's a chance we can help those people, I'm taking it." Howl cleared his throat, "Hopper, we're sending you our coordinates. When you get here proceed to our starboard airlock. We'll have a medical team standing by."

"Thank you," Hopper said, "We'll see you soon. Hopper out."

Howl handed the headset back to the comm tech and turned to face Sairgon. "You never did ask where he got our hailing frequency from, sir," the Lieutenant said.

The old captain shrugged, "I guess we'll find out when he gets here."

Less than a standard hour later, a scorched, battle-damaged P8-950 Patrol Boat dropped out of hyperspace. The *Thunderstrike's* ever faithful companion, the Dornean Gunship *Apailana's Promise*, escorted the craft in, cannons trained on it and ready to fire. Slowly, the aged vessel aligned with the *Thunderstrike's* airlock. The greeting party consisted of Howl, Sairgon, four soldiers with weapons pointed on the door and Von Geiz with his medical team standing by. They heard the groaning of old hydraulics as the clamps latched onto the vessel, then a hiss of air as the airlock opened.

Jim Hopper stood in the doorway of the airlock with his hands held up. He looked awful; his eyes were bloodshot, his brown jacket was crumpled and there were bruises all over his face. Besides that, he looked much more different than Howl remembered, with a full black beard and slightly out-of-shape body. "Sorry we dropped in so suddenly," he said with a grimace, "I left my blaster on the ship."

"Walk to us slowly, Jim" Howl gently ordered. Hopper complied and allowed himself to be patted down by a soldier. He lowered his hands and weakly saluted Howl, "Thank you captain."

"How many are in there?" Howl asked.

"Five."

"Alright, tell them to come out, one at a time."

Hopper nodded and turned to the doorway and shouted, "Guys, it's

alright. Come out slowly, one at a time."

There was a muffled argument coming from the ship. After a few seconds, the group heard footsteps. A boy wearing a dark blue jacket and a light green tunic stepped out with a nervous smile, his blue eyes peeking out under curly light brown hair covered by a white and blue Lightball cap.

"Uh... hi...?" he said, eyes darting around the room. He swallowed.

"Lower your weapons" Howl said to his men. Three of the soldiers lowered their blasters but one of them kept his rifle pointed at the boy and his finger on the trigger with a dead-set expression. "Namir," Howl said, "Lower it." Hazram Namir slowly lowered his rifle, but didn't relax his grip on it. "Yes, sir." he grumbled.

The poor boy looked shell-shocked. Howl had seen far too many children wander out of a warzone in a daze with the same expression. He didn't know what happened at Moorja, but he did know that this kid needed help. The old captain knelt down to be on eye level with the boy and put on a gentle smile. "What's your name, son?" he asked.

The boy fiddled with his backpack strap and shifted nervously from foot to foot. "It's... Dustin... sir..." he said slowly.

"Well, Dustin, you're safe now. No Imperial is going to get you with us around."

Dustin slowly nodded. "Okay..."

"Why don't you take a seat down the hall for a bit and we'll let your friends aboard, okay?"

"Okay..." he repeated. One of the soldiers gently guided him away from the airlock and he leaned against the wall, watching the entranceway.

Next came a darker-skinned boy, wearing a red jacket covering a light blue tunic. A blood-red bandanna with a faded blue CIS insignia was wrapped around his black hair atop a pair of squinting brown eyes. He was cradling an old grey helmet with a red visor slit as he approached Howl. He was looking down at the floor, avoiding eye

contact.

"What's your name, son?" Howl asked.

"Lucas" the boy muttered.

"Alright Lucas, you're safe. We'll protect you."

"Thanks..." he mumbled as he wandered over to Dustin, took off his backpack and sat down, leaning his head against the helmet in his knees.

The captain turned as he heard two pairs of feet slowly make their way through the airlock. A sullen-faced black haired boy was leading another boy through. He wore a stripped white tunic and a dark blue jacket. He adjusted his backpack slightly as his brown eyes peered into the hallway.

However, it was the second boy who caught Howl's full attention. He shuffled along close behind the first, brown eyes darting around the room in curiosity. He wore a white tunic and a light-blue jacket. But the most intriguing aspect about him was his black military-style buzz cut. *Strange*, Howl thought, *former Sub-Adult Group cadet, perhaps?*

The boy hesitated in the doorway and took a step back as he looked around the room, a worried expression on his face. The boy leading him paused and locked eyes with him for a moment. Then he turned and said with a tired voice, "She doesn't like blasters"

"*She*"? Howl took a quick glance at his troops, who looked just as surprised as he was. Even the usually stony-faced Namir raised an eyebrow.

The girl tentatively looked over at Hopper. "Friends?" she asked.

"Yes. These are friends," he answered, giving a sideways glance to Howl, "Right?"

"Right" Howl echoed.

The girl nodded, but didn't move any closer. Howl smiled again and

looked at the boy, "And what might your name be?"

"Mike" he answered, "This is Eleven," he said indicating the girl behind him, "We call her El for short."

That's an... unusual name, Howl thought.

"Can you guys please help Will now?" Mike asked.

"I'm sorry?"

"That's the injured kid," Hopper said, "He's currently unresponsive."

Von Geiz stepped forward, "Permission to retrieve him for treatment, sir?"

"Permission granted."

Von Geiz motioned to his two assistant medics who pushed a gurney into the other ship. Mike and Eleven walked over to the same wall that their friends were up against. Howl surveyed each of them. They were dirty and exhausted with the same downcast, forlorn expression. None of them could have been older than twelve or thirteen years old. "What happened, Jim?" Howl quietly asked.

Hopper let out a long sigh, "The Empire wiped their town out".

Howl was about to ask for clarification when he heard a loud expletive shouted from within the Patrol Boat. Von Geiz ran out and stopped in front of Hopper, "Tell me everything that happened to that boy, *now!*" the normally mild-mannered medic ordered.

"All I know is that he spent a week without eating or drinking anything while breathing in toxic atmosphere..." Hopper promptly explained.

"What kind of toxins did he inhale?" Von Geiz demanded.

"I have no idea," Hopper said, "When we found him there was some kind of... black snake or slug or something sticking out of his mouth."

"A... what?" Von Geiz asked, "Do you have it?"

Hopper gave him a look of disbelief, "No, I yanked it out and blasted it. Why the hell would I take it with me?"

"So I could see if it left parasites in his body" Von Geiz answered "Anything else?"

"I might have broken some of his ribs doing CPR on him..." Hopper added as the two medics frantically wheeled the gurney out. Howl leaned over and recoiled slightly. The boy was unconscious, his skin as pale as a corpse and his brown hair faded. A red and yellow jacket covered his malnourished skinny body that struggled to breathe. One of the medics was running alongside, shinning a penlight into each of his green eyes. "Pupil response good!" she called out.

Von Geiz whipped out his comlink, "Medbay, prepare for preadolescent human male afflicted with severe dehydration, malnourishment, unknown toxin, possible internal bleeding, possible parasitic infection and..." he barked as he glanced at Hopper "possible blunt force trauma to the ribcage and sternum."

The former Ranger rolled his eyes.

"He's going to be okay, right?" Mike asked as he and the other kids watched the medics rush pass with Will. Von Geiz paused and turned to face him, "Kid, I've never had a soldier die under my care, and I'm sure as hell not going to start with your friend." He then started running after the gurney. "Do we still have that stomach pump?" he shouted as he rounded the corner.

The other kids watched him go, each with a concerned expression on their face. "So... what now?" Dustin nervously asked.

"Good question." Howl said. He turned to face one of his soldiers, "Charmer, take these kids to the mess and get them something to eat."

Charmer nodded. "Right away, sir. Alright, come with me, guys," he said with a smile.

The kids looked at Hopper, who gave a nod of approval, "Go ahead."

"Alright..." Mike said, "See you later, I guess..."

The boys followed Charmer down the corridor, but Eleven paused. She turned around to see Namir watching her intently. Quickly, he averted his gaze. Eleven frowned, confused when she felt a hand on her shoulder. "Come on, El." Mike said. Taking one last look at the soldier, Eleven followed her friends down the hallway.

"You're coming with me to explain all of this" Howl told Hopper.

"Let's get to it, then."

The two of them walked down the hallway without another word.

2. Caf and Contemplation

FIVE LIGHT-YEARS OFF THE CORELLIAN TRADE SPINE HYPERLANE

Day Three of Operation Skyhook

Howl led Hopper into the conference room with Sairgon trailing behind. Hopper sunk into a chair, leaning back with his arms folded and a resigned expression on his face.

"Do you want anything?" Howl asked as he settled down across from him, "Tea, caf, water?"

"Got anything stronger?"

Howl shook his head, "Alcohol is against Alliance regulations."

"You people have regs?" Hopper muttered.

"We're not as disorganized as the Empire would have you think."

Hopper groaned, "I'll take a caf then."

"Alright," Howl said, "Lieutenant?"

Sairgon nodded and walked out of the room. "So," Howl said, "what happened?"

Hopper looked down at the table and took a long breath, "About a week ago, a kid went missing on the way home from his friend's house in the middle of the night. I thought his barve of a father took him, but it turned out that some kind of escaped Imperial... 'specimen' got him instead."

"Specimen?" Howl asked.

"That's what the datapad called it," Hopper said as he removed the datapad in question from a jacket pocket and placed it on the table. He slid it across towards Howl. The captain caught it and turned it

on. "Continue, please" he said as he began browsing the contents.

"Never saw the thing myself, but the kids say that it's humanoid, pale and its head opened up like... petals on a flower," Hopper explained, "It was impervious to blasterfire too."

"So you believe this creature was... created by the Empire?"

Hopper snorted, "No, they didn't make it. They found it." He leaned over and folded his hands together, "They opened some kind of portal to another dimension and it crawled out."

"Another dimension?" Howl asked skeptically. Sairgon entered the room and placed a cup of caf by Hopper and tea by Howl. "Thank you, Lieutenant," Howl said, distracted.

Hopper ignored his cup and continued, "It's like a... I don't know, a mirror-image of ours, except it was dark, cold and the atmosphere was toxic. There were organic tendrils and sacs everywhere."

"How do you know this?" Howl asked as he handed the datapad over to a fascinated Sairgon.

"We went in there to get Will."

"But how did you access it?"

"The Imps gave us rad suits and let us walk into the portal."

"Why?"

Hopper shrugged, "They probably wanted us to grab Will for their experiments. We found him half-dead with a slug in his mouth. When we headed back to the portal, the facility was being run with a skeleton crew. I grabbed that datapad as we ran out."

"We?"

Hopper ignored the question, "All of the MI people and black ops troops were going after the kids."

"The kids?"

"Yes..." Hopper said. He glanced at Sairgon with suspicion, then looked back at Howl with a frown, "Micha, what I'm about to tell you can't leave this room, and I prefer that it'd be just between the two of us."

Howl studied him for a moment, then turned towards his Lieutenant, "Sairgon, go make a copy of that data."

"Yes sir," he said. He walked out of the room, keeping his eyes on Hopper as he did so.

Hopper took a long swig of his drink before looking at Howl straight in the eyes. "This can't leave the room," he repeated.

"Jim, I swear I'm not going to tell anyone, and you know I won't," Howl said, "Don't you trust me?"

"I trust you," Hopper said, "I don't trust your kriffing Rebellion."

Howl frowned in confusion, "What?"

"Look, Eleven is.... I don't know, special I guess. She can... move things around without touching them and could read people's thoughts" Hopper explained. "That's how we got your hailing frequency; I showed her that picture of our old squad and asked her to get the frequency from you."

Howl's first thought was that the young, curious girl was a walking security breach. His second was that she could be an extremely useful asset for Alliance Intelligence. "So, how big of a range do you think her... ah, ability has?" he tentatively asked.

"I don't know, and I'm not going to test it," Hopper snapped, "And I'm not going to let you people start forcing her to be your spy either."

"Jim," Howl slowly began, "If she could read people's minds, then it could change the course of this Rebellion..."

"I don't care about your damn revolution!" Hopper angrily shouted, "Just finding you left her completely drained, so what the hell do you think is going to happen if you have her start reading the minds of people across the entire galaxy?!"

"Jim..." Howl said in a placating tone.

"You don't know what the Imperials did to her, Micha. They did horrible things to her to hone that ability, and I'm not going to let that happen again."

"Jim," Howl repeated, maintaining his calm tone, "We're not the Empire. We won't stoop to their level."

"Really?" Hopper asked incredulously, "What about the bombings on Kuat? What about those Partisans' terrorism tactics? What about the POW executions or all those kids you gave blasters to and pointed at the nearest Stormtrooper? "

"Those were unfortunate decisions we were forced to make to hasten the Empire's fall. Believe me, none of them were made easily."

Hopper sprang out of his chair, giving Howl a look of utter disgust, "So you excuse your group's actions by justifying it with some crap about the greater good, is that it?"

"That's not..."

"I'm pretty sure that none of those MI agents or Stormtroopers signed on to torture kids or to slaughter an entire town of loyal Imperial subjects. They were fed the same crap you're telling me now, about how it was for the good of the Empire" Hopper bitterly exclaimed. Howl was silent.

"So tell me, Captain Evon," Hopper continued, "What will *your* Intel agents do when they find out that they have a way to look inside Palpatine's head, but that way isn't strong enough or willing to do it?"

Hopper sat back down and folded his arms again. For a while the two men stared at each other, as if daring the other to speak. Finally, it was Howl who broke the silence; "Look, Jim, I'll contact High Command, and ask them to grant you and the kids asylum in exchange for that datapad and testimony about this Hypergate Project. I swear that I won't mention Eleven."

"Thanks," Hopper mumbled, not quite convinced. He quickly finished his caf and stood up, "I'm going to go check on Will."

"Wait," Howl said as his former comrade turned to leave, "You kept saying 'we' before. Who went in that portal with you?"

Hopper paused keeping his back to the captain. "His mother."

"Will's?"

"Yeah."

"Where is she now?"

"Dead" Hopper flatly stated.

With that, he stepped out into the hallway, closing the door behind him.

"Sorry guys, we haven't restocked in a while, and this is the best I could come up with."

Corporal Pol "Charmer" Andrissus passed out four bowls filled with some kind of doughy bread with green meat mixed in to the four kids seated at the mess hall table. It took a while to convince them that the Rebel Alliance wasn't the anarchistic terrorist organization that the Empire portrayed it as, but Charmer calmed their fears.

"Uh... what is this, exactly?" Dustin asked.

"Polystarch bread and veg-meat; the 'fancy' military rations" Charmer explained as he sat down across from the kids, "The normal stuff is just a nutrition cube suspended in jelly."

"What's that like?" Dustin asked.

Charmer smiled, "Like a dry cube of sand covered in mynock piss."

He chuckled when Dustin made a disgusted face, "Hey, being a freedom fighter isn't as glamorous as the recruitment pamphlets claim."

"There's pamphlets?"

"I think he's joking, Dustin," Mike said in between bites of the bread.

"Oh..." Dustin said, a bit embarrassed, "So... how do you sign up?"

"Well, Twilight Company runs open recruitment drives on every planet we liberate from the Empire. We get people from all walks of life signing on; farmers, merchants, teachers, ex-convicts, bounty hunters and former Army Cadets like yours truly," Charmer explained.

Mike paused his eating, "You're a Stormtrooper?"

"Army Trooper," Charmer corrected, "Stormtroopers tend not to defect. And it's *former* Army Trooper."

"Why did you leave?" Mike asked.

"Because of what they taught me in training," Charmer said, "Show no mercy to the enemy, use brutal force and make everyone fear you. Fierfrek, they said that killing a Rebel's family was a valid tactic if the opportunity arose."

Charmer leaned back, "I guess I just opened my eyes one day and saw what the Empire stood for; fear and tyranny."

"So... are you guys like the Separatists?" Dustin asked.

"Kind of. For one, we're called 'the Alliance to Restore the Republic' for a reason; we're not trying to secede from the Empire, we're trying to kick old Palps off his comfy throne for the good of everyone. Also we don't have a droid army." Charmer smirked, "Naw, us meatbags have to go and put our own asses on the line."

"They weren't all droids," Lucas quietly added from his end of the table.

"Right, they were quite a few organic groups in the CIS; in fact most of those guys were the first members of the Alliance military." Charmer pointed at Lucas's bandanna, "I'm going to assume that's from a family member."

"Yeah..." Lucas said, touching the bandanna, "It was my dad's. He was

born on Jabiim and fought for the Nationalists."

"I heard that was one of hell of a slog." Charmer said.

"He was a Nimbus Commando," Lucas continued, not hearing the Rebel. "The best of the best..."

"Nimbus..." Charmer echoed, "Aren't those the guys that flew around on repulsorlift skates?"

"Yeah..." Lucas quietly muttered, looking at the helmet next to him. He looked like he was about to start crying.

Charmer frowned, realizing his mistake, "Stang, I'm sorry for bringing that up. I'm a kriffing idiot and I've gotten way too desensitized to loss."

"It's fine..." Lucas mumbled.

"No, it's not." Charmer said, "Look guys, I don't know what exactly you've been through and I'm not going to pry. I know that nothing I'll say can bring them back. All I can tell you is that I'm sorry, and that we'll all fight to the death to prevent those people from hurting you again."

The kids all simply sat, taking in the soldier's words. For the first time since fleeing Moorja, the full impact of what had happened to them came crashing down. They each looked numb, as they thought about everyone they left behind. Dustin was rubbing his eyes when Eleven broke the silence; "Thank you."

"Of course," Charmer said with a gentle smile, "We're the good guys."

"Good guys..." she repeated, frowning in slight confusion.

"Charmer?"

Charmer turned to face the doorway of the mess, where one of the medics was standing. She looked at the misty-eyed boys and then back to the expectant Corporal, "This might not be the best time..."

"Just say it, Ryla."

"Von Geiz said that the boy is regaining consciousness." She turned to the kids "You can see him now, if you want..."

Mike swallowed. He desperately wanted to see his friend, but he really didn't want to relieve the terrible week that had passed by explaining everything to Will. But he felt that if anyone should be the one to break the awful news to him, it should be his friends. He took a breath and stood up, "I'm going," he announced, "Do you guys want to come?"

"Yeah." Lucas said as he scooped up the helmet. Dustin simply gave a small nod. Eleven copied him.

"Yes," she said.

Mike slipped his backpack on and looked at the medic.

"We're ready," he said with a grimace.